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U.S. Envoy in Salvador Said to Meet With Agent

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SAN SALVADOR, Oct. 15 — The United States Ambassador to El Salvador, who two days ago denied that he knew a longtime Central Intelligence Agency agent linked to supply operations for anti-Sandinista rebels, in fact met and had lunch with him, a highly placed official said today.

For the first time today, Salvadoran military and Government sources also acknowledged that American civilians working for the Nicaraguan rebels, known as contras, operated out of El Salvador.

Earlier this week, Ambassador Edwin G. Corr denied knowing the longtime agent, Max Gomez. An embassy spokesman said today that Mr. Corr "did not mean that." However, the spokesman declined to give further details.

Mr. Gomez has been named as the director of an American-backed rebel supply operation from the Ilopango air base east of San Salvador.

Restrictions by Congress

Mr. Gomez was first identified as the operation's director by an American captured in Nicaragua after his plane was shot down during one of these missions. His position here was later con-

firmed by two highly reliable sources with close C.I.A. contacts.

Congressional restrictions prohibit the use of any United States aid for such operations, and ever since Eugene Hasenfus, the captured American, gave details of the contra supply missions from El Salvador at a news conference in Managua American officials have tried to distance themselves from the group.

Reagan Administration officials at first said Mr. Gomez worked for a private American group helping the contras. Vice President Bush then said he had met Mr. Gomez three times and that the Cuban-American worked for the Salvadoran military as an adviser in counterinsurgency tactics.

These statements linking Mr. Gomez to El Salvador have both angered and embarrassed the Salvadoran Government, according to military and Government sources, who acknowledged for the first time today that American civilians here run a contra supply operation.

"Bush tried to wash his hands of this and hand the problem to us," said Mauricio Salvador Hernández, a spokesman for the military.

Not Adviser, Spokesman Says

Mr. Hernández said both Honduras and El Salvador had been used by the

contras. He added that despite what Mr. Bush had said, Mr. Gomez was not working as an adviser to the Salvadoran military.

The highly placed official who said Ambassador Corr met with Mr. Gomez, known to the Ambassador by the name Rodriguez, also said that Mr. Gomez was not working as an adviser to the Salvadoran military, but as a private citizen for the "resistance."

A Salvadoran military source said, "There is a group of American civilians working here with the contras."

"I cannot say for sure that they aren't with the embassy because I don't know," he added.

A paper found on the downed rebel plane reportedly lists the name of the former chargé of the United States Embassy here, David Passage. The three American crew members of the plane carried Salvadoran Air Force identity cards. Business cards of a Salvadoran officer and of a close associate of White House officials were also found on the rebel plane.

Navy Chief in Denial

The commander of the navy, Lieut. Col. Humberto P. Villalta, whose card was found on one of the American crew members, said today that he did not know any of them.

He explained that he often gave out

his card, attaching it to funeral wreaths and handing it to Americans he meets on Fridays at the Sheraton Hotel's "happy hour."

A senior Salvadoran official said Mr. Bush's statements had put President José Napoleón Duarte in a "very difficult" position.

Days before Mr. Bush's said that he knew Mr. Gomez and that he worked as an adviser to the military, Mr. Duarte denied knowing anything about Mr. Gomez or supply flights from Ilopango air base.

The senior Government official said Mr. Bush had put Mr. Duarte in the position of having to explain why he said earlier that he did not know Mr. Gomez and of having to bring the armed forces into line for running such an operation.

"How can we come back and say we know about this man without taking any action?" he asked.